OUR FAITH

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Purpose:--"*To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man.*"

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Prayer

O Spirit of Life, who has created all by Thy power, and in thine own good time hast kindled the fire upon my own soul's altar, have Thy way with me. Renew Thy life within me. Confirm my confidence in the goodness of life.

Lift up my spirit out of its human distress, wrought by desire unfulfilled. I sought the way of knowledge, and my first discoveries were a delight. But soon the boundaries of my mind were closed around me, and I was held within a wall of mystery. I sought the way of happiness, looking for the fountain of a joy undimmed. But the search itself was born of pain, and every human joy was rimmed around with life's black edge. I sought the way of goodness, but what I would not, that I did. The more I pressed toward the goal the more I felt the grief of goodness unattained. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from my human distress?

O Spirit of Life, I turn to Thee. O Wellspring of the life of all, it is of Thy life I have partaken. O Life within my life, I cannot renounce Thee. I ask not that the conditions of my humanity be changed, but only that the life within me triumph. In my acknowledgment of Thee my gratitude for life is born. In commerce with Thee my confidence in life is ever kindled and renewed. Seal my faith that life is good, and confirm my confidence in its victory. Amen.

Pascal wisely said: "God wishes to render Himself recognizable to such as seek Him with their whole heart, and hidden to those who do not."

A Full-Orbed Faith Will Not Stop With Man

Faith is not dead today. It never will be as long as man chooses to live. But faith today is seeking for enriched objects. The normal, healthy life finds faith as essential as breathing. Nevertheless, multitudes are in distress as they seek abiding sources of trust.

Basic in this distress is the hunger for two things. First, man would like to believe in himself and his kind. Yet here we meet with a skepticism as great as any we know. There was a time when faith in man seemed an easy alternative to the older option of faith in God. Let man assert himself. Let him center his attention exclusively upon himself and his worldly affairs. As a theory this belief has not found a general acceptance but as a practice this is what has come to pass. But man finds it no easier to believe in himself today than he has found it easy to believe in many other things. Man's one great fear today is man. He distrusts his own kind as he distrusts nothing else.

Obviously, the kind of man in whom society has been so willing to trust is not equal to the task of transforming society. The task of transforming society calls for the transformation of man himself, for the spiritualizing of man with those graces of character which are fundamental in Christianity. All our schemes of human salvation will go bankrupt without these.

A full-orbed faith will not stop with man. It will seek an answer in the totality of being, in God. To close the door of faith upon the wider relationships which every one of us sustains is to shut out realities entirely

too significant for human omission. "No man is an island," wrote John Donne, "but part of the main." We are a part of a vast order of things to which we shall never cease to relate ourselves in terms of spiritual purpose and comradeship.

ROBERT S. MILLER
(Minister, First Congregational Society, Unitarian, Burlington, Vermont)

A Quote from Toynbee

"If the divine father of the human family is left out of the reckoning, there is no possibility of forging any alternative bond of purely human texture which will avail by itself to hold mankind together.

"The only society that is capable of embracing the whole of mankind is a superhuman **Civitas Dei;** and the conception of a society which embraces mankind and nothing but mankind is an academic chimaera.

"The Stoic Epictetus was as well aware of this supreme truth as the Christian Apostle Paul, but, whereas Epictetus stated the fact as a conclusion of philosophy, St. Paul preached it as the gospel of a new revelation made by God to man through the life and death of Christ."

("A Study of History," 1947, p. 495-6.)

Schweitzer on Jesus

"Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. It is the solid foundation of Christianity.

"The truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it. Not the historical Jesus, but the spirit which goes forth from him and in the spirits of men strives for new influence and rule, is that which overcomes the world.

"The abiding and eternal in Jesus is absolutely independent of historical knowledge and can only be understood by contact with his spirit which is still at work in the world. In proportion as we have the Spirit of Jesus we have the true knowledge of Jesus.

"Jesus as a concrete historical personality remains a stranger to our time, but his spirit, which lies hidden in his words, is known in simplicity, and its influence is direct.

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."

ALBERT SCHWEITZER
(From the closing chapter of his "Quest of The Historical Jesus")

A Spokesman for God

The most inspiring session of the Washington conference, for this delegate at least, was the Pearson Lecture by Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, in which he insisted that the great contribution which liberal religion has to give to our troubled world is **the liberal conception of God,** that real and omnipresent God whom only a mad atheist can deny, and in denying Whom we cannot avoid using God's own laws, that living God Who keeps us from aloneness in the world, and Who can preserve us from the "forlorn" and "anguished" morbidity of both "existentialism" and "neo-Calvinism" with their inevitable irrational consequences in behavior. It was a moving and powerful experience to hear this realistic speaker say, as the conclusion of his address, that our basis of hope in this atomic age is nothing less than our faith—"Now are we the children of God."

HARVEY SWANSON
(Minister, Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pa.)

Washington Commentary

"There is a crisis in the denomination." So spoke the first speaker at the opening of the Ministers' Institute which began the October Unitarian meetings in Washington.

The gravity of the present crisis within the denomination had already become evident to the general public in the Greater Boston area by the implication of a declaration made by the President of the Amer-

ican Unitarian Association appearing in the columns of the Boston Herald. In a forthright statement of his position he had referred to those who believe in God as if they were but a group within the denomination, just a group, and classifiable in that respect with Communists and a certain small Committee. "So long as I am President of the Association," he said, "no such group will be permitted to have its way—neither the communists, nor the theists, nor the committee of fourteen."

In that sentence those who believe in God are accounted but a "group" within the Association, with the Communists to the left of them and a small committee to the right. (In another version of the same statement, mailed from headquarters, "the humanists" appeared between the Communists and the theists.)

Such a relegation of believers in God to the position of but a group within our denomination shocks many people to their depths. It is without parallel in our history. Indeed, since belief in God would seem to be the irreducible minimum that can link people together in religious fellowship, it may be that it is the first time in the history of mankind that a statement by the head of a religious organization has reduced believers in God to the status of a group within it.

It should be noted, however, that the statement was not endorsed by the Directors of the Association, and it is possible that the Directors may think it wise to rule it "unconstitutional," for such it appears eminently to be, and the people who are disturbed may get what comfort they can from keeping its evident unconstitutionality in mind.

An item of news, perhaps the biggest that "broke" during the week, originated in the Philippines. It appears that a vast group of Christians there, previously affiliated with us, is going over to the Episcopalians. The reason for this was not fully available. But we may make the shrewd guess that had those Philippine Christians kept in mind what the constitution of the A.U.A. says, rather than what they might have read about us in the newspapers, the news from the Philippines would have been of a very different order.

One of the Washington speakers deplored the fact that the Unitarians were carrying their controversies into the daily papers. That sentiment was loudly applauded. But the fact is that nowadays, when men seek to be of service to the denomination by evaluating its official acts, there is a natural tendency to shy away from submitting criticisms to the Christian Register. That organ, formerly used for such a purpose, is now controlled by the officials themselves. The natural dignity of man is opposed to a system under which you can have a criticism of an official act published only by grace of the official himself. Truth, as Milton urged, is never worsted in a free and open encounter. And never, he also urged, is an encounter a free and open one when the administration being evaluated has a patent on the chief evaluating organ.

The Christian Register remains meanwhile in the hands of the administration. But a resolution was adopted which may lead, next May, to that separation of the journalistic from the administrative function which was hoped for by Dr. Palfrey Perkins and others who signed the resolution.

The retiring Moderator's speech was brief and pointed. He called for a strong united front for Unitarian advance. His call was echoed variously throughout the meetings. Yet some thoughtful minds remained bewildered. Since the word "Unitarian" is being much used among us in a way different from its only use throughout the whole academic world, and different from its definition in our dictionaries, it would seem that meanwhile all we can unite in is a debate over the new connotation, whatever it is, now being given to that word. The lack of intellectual clarity as to what we are advancing when we are advancing Unitarianism is lamentable.

The address on recruiting for the ministry was given only a sentence in the Evening Star. It read: "The failure of the Unitarian Association to direct young men into its ministry was laid primarily to low pay." How strange that sounds standing alone! The recent college graduate in the writer's own church who has been accepted for entrance into the Meadville Theological School knows all about the financial hazards. Our prayer is that he will not be de-

terred by other things as he comes to know the denomination better.

At the meeting of the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice, perhaps the most fecund remark was the one which denied the validity of the dichotomy, frequently made, between personal character and social action. The remark was reminiscent both of Aristotle, who defined justice as the actions of a man of good personal character in so far as those actions are considered in their social context, and of the New Testament, which inseparably links love for God to love for man. Active participation in some organization seeking to affect creatively the structure of human relationships was urged as the duty of all Christians.

Of special importance was the role played by the Commission on Planning and Review in the business sessions. This Commission's leap into functional prominence is a most healthy sign. Its request to all and sundry beforehand to send in their comments on denominational affairs had a cathartic effect upon numerous people who had been wanting to express their thoughts to someone with some authority who might give them a sympathetic hearing. The result was a sort of Congressional hearing, but, being conducted by mail, and in "strict confidence," had the resultant advantages and disadvantages.

The Commission presented a number of recommendations. How far those recommendations represented the majority opinion of our constituency, who can tell? However, they were only recommendations, and it required a vote of the meeting to turn them into directives to the Directors. This vote was readily given.

A motion on church union, envisaging a full organic union between Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, was carried unanimously. It calls for a report, two years hence, on the possibility of a complete organic merger, primarily between Unitarians and Universalists, in a united liberal church.

The President's sermon, which closed the meetings, envisaged a federation of religious liberals — Unitarians, Universalists, Reformed Jews, etc. He presented that as his first major objective. No motion on the subject of "federation" had been brought before the meeting of the Association, and hence no opportunity had been provided to give its President a directive regarding it. Yet, in the federation envisaged he would include, he said, not only religious liberals, but also ethical culturists. So before our President proceeds to spend his energies in trying to bring religious liberals and ethical culturists into the same federation, surely some opportunity ought to be given us for the open consideration of such a proposition, and of its possible effect on the proposed organic union upon which the sense of the meeting was taken. Would it not be wiser to wait and see if the Annual Meeting next May will endorse our federation with Ethical Culture Societies?

The final word of this brief and partial commentary should be a word of healing for a denomination sick with internal strife. The healing will come, but only to the extent to which we abandon the leader principle as the basis of our denominational organization and substitute the Christian "all-ye-are-brethren" principle.

ROWLAND GRAY-SMITH
(Minister, New North Church, Hingham, Mass.)
(An elaboration of the final paragraph of the above article is promised for a later issue. Ed.)

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